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ABSTRACT

An inexpensive way to introduce students to Black art during Black History Month--February--is described. Whenever possible, students should be exposed to original works of art in exhibitions. But if there are limited funds, art reproductions can work just as well. Teachers can make xerographic copies of Black art from library books. With a few dollars, xerographic copies can be mounted in plastic frames and displayed in public school and college classrooms and in libraries. As an example, ten works by Charles White, reproduced from "Images of Dignity: The Drawings of Charles White" by Benjamin Horowitz, are provided. Students and others can be introduced to the art on display through visual literacy viewing guides. The guide--a sample one is provided--can be used to help viewers evaluate the display. (RM)

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SHARING BLACK HISTORY MONTH ART THROUGH XEROGRAPHY AND VISUAL LITERACY

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to present an example approach to sharing Black History Month Art through the use of a virtual zero-budget. Three major questions will be addressed: 1) What is Black History Month Art?; 2) Why is there a need to share Black History Month Art?; 3) What is the relationship between Black History Month Art, Xerography and Visual Literacy? The readers (viewers) will have an opportunity to use a visual literacy viewing guide to perceive, touch and evaluate ten xerographic examples of Black History Month Art by Charles White. Such xerographic prints can be produced from library books, mounted/framed and exhibited in public school and college classrooms and in libraries.

SHARING BLACK HISTORY MONTH ART THROUGH XEROGRAPHY AND VISUAL LITERACY

Two major processes are relevant for a work of art: creating and sharing. The creating process involves an original form of perception, idea, process and product; it is the initial means of perceiving, forming, completing and evaluating a work of art. The sharing process is the means through which an artist or collector or advocate presents art to viewers. If a masterpiece, this process becomes unceasing, for the art is shared with viewers from century to century.

The purpose of this project is to present an example approach to sharing Black History Month Art through the use of a virtual zero-budget. Three major questions will be addressed.

- What is Black History Month Art?
- Why is there a need to share Black History Month Art?
- What is the relationship between Black History Month Art, Xerography and Visual Literacy?

What is Black History Month Art?

Black History Month Art is any original two- or three-dimensional forms created by Black non-Americans or American artists and are displayed annually in February, Black History

Month. The purpose of the display is to focus attention to the rich past and present technical and aesthetic achievements of Blacks in the visual arts.

The celebration of Black History Month began on February 1926 as Negro History Week. It was devised by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the founder of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH). Then in 1976 Black History Week was expanded to a month long celebration.

On September 9, 1915, Dr. Woodson, and other colleagues, founded the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. The Association promoted four purposes:

> The collection of sociological and historical data on the Negro, the study of peoples of African blood, the publishing of books in this field, and the promotion of harmony between the races by acquainting the one with the other (Young, 1980, p. 6).

Former President Jimmy Carter (1980) summarized the preceding ASALH interwoven purposes with the annual observance of Black History Month.

> The Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History can be justly proud of the contributions of its members to scholarship in a long-neglected field.
>
> Since your founder, Carter G. Woodson, initiated Afro-American (Black) History Month, this annual observance has become an important tradition throughout the nation. By making people aware of the achievements and contributions of black Americans from the earliest history of our people, you have helped to correct the record and brought all Americans a better understanding of their past.

> To understand the present, to solve its problems and meet its challenges, we must understand our history. Through this annual observance, you have helped give young black people the knowledge of their roots and the facts of their proud heritage.
>
> I urge schools and communities throughout the nation to encourage the study of our past, to plan projects and programs to commemorate important historical events and movements and to highlight those whose lives made a difference. I urge all Americans to learn about our heritage and to participate fully in our democratic system (p. 4).

Why is there a need to share Black History Month Art?

Initially the above question may seem unnecessary. Also, the preceding statement by former President Carter may appear to be the answer, but only a partial answer. There are six specific reasons for sharing Black History Month Art with all Americans: Africa, Cubism and Modern Art, Slavery, Harlem Renaissance, WPA to the 1960s, 1960s to the 1980s.

Africa

Black African artists achieved high levels in the visual arts in such kingdoms as Melle, Songhay and Ghana. Black Afro-Americans and other Americans have only to look to these past kingdoms and other periods to discover a rich sophisticated artistic heritage.

Cubism and Modern Art

This rich sophisticated African creative heritage rejuvenated the European art of classicism, academia and post-impressionism. Through the invention of Cubism, Picasso and Braque (and other artists) introduced the European civilization to the abstract African aesthetic way of thinking, solving problems, perceiving and living in the world.

Slavery

However, through slavery in America, the Black American was deprived of this rich traditional and influential African aesthetic legacy. Artistic expression, for the American slave, was only through the channels of song, dance and poetic speech.

Harlem Renaissance

Appreciable numbers of Afro-American artists began to achieve in the visual arts during the 1920s in the Black capitol of the world, Harlem. Dr. Alain Locke, father of the Harlem Renaissance, encouraged Black American artists to turn to the art of their ancestors for inspiration. Editor of the New Negro book, Dr. Locke believed that if such an art had such a rejuvenating effect on European and modern art, it would surely have a powerful liberating influence on Black artists.

African art and the environment in Harlem did promote such a positive influence on Black artistic expression. However, this was a brief flowering of such expression, for the depression of the 1930s ended the Renaissance of the 1920s.

WPA to the 1960s

Fortunately, the Works Project Administration (WPA) and other depression-era programs of President Roosevelt sustained the creative expression of Black American artists. Yet from that period of de facto segregation to the 1960s, Black American artists had limited access to exhibitions in major institutions and museums. A few Blacks did exhibit at such locations, but they were unable to enter these institutions to see their own work.

1960s to the 1980s

From the 1960s to the 1980s, high quality art by Black Americans has become a part of exhibitions in major museums and a part of major collections. But even in the 1980s, some major galleries do not consider Black American art marketable.

What is the relationship between Black History Month Art, Xerography and Visual Literacy?

Whenever possible, viewers should be exposed to original works of art in exhibitions. But if there are limited funds, or no funds, for securing such art, the goal is to expose viewers to reproductions, for reproductions are better than "no art at all." Such is the problem in many situations. Xerography is the solution. With a few coins at a neighborhood grocery store or at a print shop, xerographic copies of Black History Month Art can be produced from library books. With a few dollars, this copy art can be displayed in plastic frames in public school and college classrooms and in libraries. Through the use of visual literacy viewing guides, viewers can be introduced to a point of departure for seeing, touching and evaluating this reproduced Black History Month Art.

Charles White (1918-1979)

Ten works (Figs. 1-10) by Charles White have beeen selected as an example for sharing Black History Month Art. These xerographic prints have been reproduced from Images of Dignity: The Drawings of Charles White by Benjamin Horowitz.

White, born in Chicago to southern migrant parents, received his early artistic training mainly from the Art Institute and from books in the public library. The life-time use of Black subjects in his art is as a result of the influence of

Dr. Locke's New Negro. White's development as an artist was further nurtured by the WPA programs; in addition, he was one of the few Black artists during this era to have his work exhibited at major institutions which he could not enter.

A study of the artist's work will reveal that he consistently rendered graceful and heroic strength in all of his subjects, using mainly black and white graphic media. White (1974) has provided this description of his work.

> My work takes shape around images and ideas that are centered within the vertex of a black life experience. A nitty-gritty ghetto experience--resulting in contradictory emotions. Anguish-hope-love-despair-happiness-faith-lack of faith-dreams. Stubbornly holding on to an elusive romantic belief that the people of this land cannot always be insensitive to the dictates of justice or deaf to the voice of humanity (p. 3278).

Xerography

Dissatisfied with the blurred carbon sheet duplication of records, the physicist and patent attorney Chester F. Carlson invented xerography in 1938. He derived the term from the Greek xero, meaning dry, and graphein, to write. In the 1940s Carlson received a patent for xerography and, for its development, made agreements with the Battelle Memorial Institute and the Haloid Company. Haloid, later to become Haloid-Xerox, and then the Xerox Corporation, introduced the 914 copier in 1959 and the Model 6500 color copier in 1973. The development of

xerography became a revolution in the business and communication worlds, new tools for artists and a sizable wealth from royalties for Carlson.

Noticeable numbers of artists in the early 1960s began to use and experiment with copy machines in such locations as grocery stories, demonstration centers and their own homes. Firpo, Alexander and Katayanagi (1978) defined copy art as "anything that has been created, transformed, or enhanced through the use of a copy machine" (p. 87).

Unfortunately, the early copy artists created in isolation. There is no documentation of the individual or group who initiated (and began to develop) the concept of copy art. There is presently no professional association for this less than 20-year old still developing independent art-technology. Nevertheless, this highly personal, expressive and diversified way of creating is in gallery exhibits and is a part of the permanent collections of major museums.

Some major categories of copy art are the following:

1) Direct transfer and transformation, "a base or starting point for painting or drawing or as an extension of painting (Hill, 1980, p. 205);
2) Direct imaging, placing three-dimensional objects on the document glass or platen of the copier;

3) Portraits, placing own face or faces of friends, models on the document glass or platen of the copier;
4) Collages created at the machine;
5) Heat transfer to T-shirts, jewelry, quilts, books, and sculpture;
6) Using slides to transfer imagery to another surface, most effectively through the use of the Xerox 6500 color copier and slide attachment.

This sharing of Black art project is reflective of only the first category of copy art: direct transfer and transformation. All of the art (Figs. 1-10) in this article has been produced through the xerographic (dry) process of the Mita DC-232, a Kwik-Kopy Print Shop black and white machine.

Future work in this area of research, however, will include the Xerox 6500 color copier and other inventions directly from the Xerox Corporation. Notably, machines and equipment have been selected from this corporation for several reasons:

1) Dry process of printing, without the use of photographic liquid chemicals;
2) Use of ordinary paper and/or other paper materials for printing purposes;
3) Sharp, detailed resolution of type and imagery;
4) Permanent black and white and color printed copies.

Visual Literacy

There are many definitions for visual literacy. However, only two relevant definitions have been selected for the objectives of this project.

Visual literacy originated in 1966 with the thinking of John L. Debes and his affiliation with Eastman Kodak. Three years later, the National Conference on Visual Literacy developed this definition:

> Visual literacy refers to a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, and symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication (Debes, 1969, p. 27).

The other selected definition for visual literacy is a summary of the preceding:

> The ability to use our eyes for more than superficial observation of the world around us (Chapnick, 1983, p. 22).

Viewing Guide

This visual literacy exhibition of White's ten works is an introduction to the use of a viewing guide (page 14). Designed specifically for the exhibition, the guide has three major purposes: research, motivation and documentation.

The viewing guide is a modification of the Likert-type rating scale, a highly recommended research tool for visual literacy studies. Through the use of this guide, there will be a coordination of the rich sources of visual literacy: empirical, cognitive research, past and present art techniques, forms, and technological innovations. Although this instrument has been constructed for the college age, it can be used and modified with any group. Parents, for example, can use it to motivate their very young to perceptually and tactually interact with this art by White.

Then the motivational element of the guide will introduce viewers to the visual literacy process of detailed, non-glancing, perceiving and touching of these prints. The guide, like the camera, will motivate viewers to focus on specific aesthetic qualities. Such focusing, if only for a few seconds, will enable them to see, touch and evaluate what they would not have seen through a mere glance. Because viewers will find the guide to be interesting and easy to use, they will also be motivated to study this art at their own pace. Their responses will not be considered right or wrong, only a heightened perceptual, aesthetic and subjective interaction.

For reporting the results of this viewing activity, the guide will also serve as a simplified form of documentation. No statistical numbers have been assigned to any category or

item in this instrument. Instead, each checkmark and response to items will be calculated as a numerical "1." For example, the evaluation section may equal to a total of 10 points which may be distributed in greater or lesser numbers in the category of the like very much, like, do not like nor dislike, dislike, dislike very much.

The visual literacy viewing guide is on the following page.

Visual Literacy Viewing Guide

Please use this viewing guide to see, touch and evaluate 10 xerographic works of art by Charles White. These prints have been reproduced from the book Images of Dignity by Benjamin Horowitz.

Part I--Evaluation of Art

Please give us your true responses to this art, not what you think that we want you to express. Check blanks below.

	Like Very Much	Like	Do Not Like Nor Dislike	Dislike	Dislike Very Much
1. John Brown	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
2. Mother and Child	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
3. Young Farmer	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. Frederick Douglass	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
5. Folk Singer	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
6. Awaken from the Unknowing	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
7. Songs Belafonte Sings	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
8. Songs Belafonte Sings	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
9. General Moses	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
10. Bass Concerto	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Part II--Favorite Art

View again the entire collection. Select one favorite work of art from the 10 prints.

Number_____

Comments.

Thank you.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

1. John Brown. 1949. Ink. Private Collection.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

2. Mother and Child. 1953. Wolff Crayon. Collection of Frances B. White.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

3. Young Farmer. 1953. Crayon. Private Collection.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

4. Frederick Douglass. 1953. Wolff Crayon. Private Collection.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

5. Folk Singer. 1957. Ink. Collection of Harry Belafonte.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

6. Awaken from the Unknowing. 1961. Charcoal. Collection of Tony Schwartz.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

7. Songs Belafonte Sings. 1963-64. Ink. Collection of Harry Belafonte.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

8. Songs Belafonte Sings. 1963-64. Ink. Collection of Harry Belafonte.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

9. General Moses (Harriet Tubman). 1965. Ink. Collection of Golden State Insurance Company.

Xerographic Prints by Charles White

10. Bass Concerto. 1966. Charcoal. Collection of R.C.A. Record Company.

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